A "Make Your Own Road Movie" storytelling / role-playing game
Game Chef 2010 - Journey: Desert, City, Skin.

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Version 1.0

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This is yet another attempt on my part to make an Open Source game design. Go ahead and make it better, advance the version number, and add your name to the author list. Even if it's just the writing: colon should be a semicolon? Misspelling? My writing style rubs you the wrong way? Please fix it. I dare you! I double dare you! But if you'd rather just give feedback in an e-mail that works too: jdfristrom@gmail.com.

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Pitch

You're on a road trip. You think you know what you want. But the other players know what you Really Need.

It's a GM-less RPG where you make your own road movie in the vein of:

- The Sure Thing
- Priscilla, Queen of the Desert
- Fanboys
- Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle
- Tommy Boy
- Bolt
- Vacation
- Little Miss Sunshine

The key ingredient of these movies that it tries to capture is that almost always "the point of the journey is not to arrive." The characters think they want something, and that's why they go on this trip, but we know that their goals are superficial, and what they Really Need is something else: love, family, freedom. And, to immerse ourselves in the feeling of being that kind of character, we let the other players pick our Real Need for us, and they don't tell us what it is. We try to figure it out on the trip.

Honestly, I'm not sure the game hits that mark, but in play I've noticed some interesting and fun side-effects: it encourages players to introduce details and backstory as they try to hint to other players what their character's Real Needs are, much in the same way a movie drops hints about what the characters really want, and it provides feel-good character growth: your character may have been a self-involved asshole when he started the trip, but by the end, he's learned the real meaning of family (or whatever.) So I think the game is worth playing anyhow.

It's a one-shot that takes 2-4 hours to play - the more players, the longer it will take.

It works for just two players (for a *Harold & Kumar* or *Tommy Boy* sized road trip) on up to six (*Fanboys*). I would recommend only trying the two player version when both players have played before.

After you play it, please let me know how it went (jdfristrom@gmail.com) or post as much of your experience as you can stand to story-games.com or indie-rpgs.com.

Game Influences

- Otherkind
- Geiger Counter
- Fiasco
- Primetime Adventures
- Sorcerer
- Ribbon Drive

Instructions

What you need:

- A road map of part of the US or part of the southwestern US. Or you can print one out during play.
- Index cards. Pencils.
- 4d6
- A token to pass from player to player. A matchbox car or van, perhaps?
- Some black and white stones or tokens - Go stones are perfect.

As a group:

> Harold: I want that.
> Kumar: What? A Hot Dog Heaven super chili cheese dog?
> Harold: No. I want that feeling. The feeling that comes over a man when he gets exactly what he desires. I need that feeling!
> Kumar: Are you saying what I think you're saying?
> Harold: We gotta go to White Castle.
>
> -Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle

Talk about how silly you want the game to be - agree on a road trip movie that has the amount of silly you want to shoot for, with *Harold & Kumar* at the high-silly end of the spectrum and *Thelma & Louise* at the other end.

Pick a city in the southwestern United States. This is your destination.

Pick a city that isn't in the southwestern United States. This is your origin.
[Note: why did I restrict the game to the southwest US? Because almost all the big cities down there have associations for me: they should really help generate story ideas. And it's a small list so my playgroup wouldn't fall into the paralysis that can come from having too many choices. Also, more than half the road movies on the list above have their destinations in the southwest US. Yeah, and there's the GameChef thing too - 'desert' was in the theme. Finally, there's a bit of me-tooism - I notice that most of the popular games these days are very specific about setting...seems like nobody makes a Universalis or Geiger Counter anymore. All that said, if you want to hack this to a different country, different time, different setting: a fellowship of heroes travelling to dispose of a magical artifact in a land of evil? A pair of galactic hitch-hikers? Please, please do and post the AP!]

Use a road map website such as Google maps to find a route from the second city to the first. Print out the road map. Draw hash marks to divide the road from your origin to your destination into segments - enough segments so everyone gets at least 1 situation on the way.

- 2 or 3 players - 6 segments
- 4 players - 8 segments
- 5 players - 5 segments
- 6 players - 6 segments

(If I'm not going to have access to a printer, like if I'm at a con or an open game night, I bring a road map of the western US and use that.)

Work out your individual "Surface Goals" together - this is why you think you want to go there. It's fine for you all to choose the same reason, but you all need a reason.

- The Party Of All Time - why do you want to be there?
- A Once In A Lifetime Opportunity - what is the opportunity?
- A Big Pile Of Money - for doing what?
- One Of The Other PC's Talked You Into Going - which one? why do you do what they say?
- An NPC Wanted You To Go - a PC who chooses this will make that NPC their Key NPC.

It can be anything, even just that you want to eat a particular food from a particular place, a la *Harold & Kumar*.

> **Example: Destination Flagstaff**
>
> One of the players picks Flagstaff as a destination city. The facilitator asks, “So, why do we want to go to Flagstaff?” and Clair’s player says, “For a tractor pull?” So they decide two of the PC’s (Billy Bob Gunderson and Jimmy James) are entering the tractor pull competition; Clair is there to present awards; and one of the PC’s is another PC’s brother, and is there because he lives in his brother’s shadow.

Describe your vehicle together. It must be big enough to carry all of you plus one; a four or five player game probably needs a van. Whatever it is, it is old or in disrepair or is overdue for maintenance; it could easily break down before you arrive at your destination. And - who owns the vehicle? Or thinks they own it?

> **Example: Destination Flagstaff**
>
> If they’re entering a tractor pull contest it seems like they’re going to have to bring their tractors - and that means some kind of large flatbed truck to carry it on. The group decides that Clair’s uncle loans them his truck, because Clair has him wrapped around his finger.

You also don't have to have a vehicle: you could try to find rides or hitch-hike the whole way, like in *The Sure Thing* or *Bolt*. (Mechanically this works as PC-vs-NPC - roll dice to get a ride.)

Individually:

What is your name?

You must have pre-existing relationships with the PCs on your left and right. Friend or family or co-worker or client or...? Work it out together. (You also probably have relationships by association with the other PCs but they don't need to be spelled out.)

Also, create an NPC whom you have a pre-existing relationship with, who factors into this journey in some way - they told you to go, they told you not to go, they're coming along to make sure you don't get in trouble, they're coming along to make sure you do get into trouble. This is your Key NPC. It is perfectly okay, even desirable, for multiple PCs to share a key NPC. Describe how your relationship with that NPC is - close, distant, mean, friendly, overprotective, overprotected. Write each NPC's name and role on a separate index card and put them in the middle with the map.

Neat trick (learned from John Aegard): fold an index card in two, so you can stand it up. Write your name, gender, and anything else you feel is important on the side facing the other players.

Everyone But You:

You don't get to decide what your PC's Real Need is. The other players do.

You'll each take turns leaving the room while the other players decide what your Real Need is. A Real Need can be to change your relationship with another PC or any of the key NPCs or even an NPC that hasn't been introduced yet ("you need to meet a nice girl"). Other Real Needs are more about self-awareness, and don't interact with another character so much.

Setting limits - it's quite possible for people to give you real needs you aren't comfortable with. One way to handle this is for the players, before they leave the room, to set limits: e.g.: "I don't want to be heterosexual" or "I don't want to do a love relationship with any of the female PC's. That would be weird." But I should add that if you don't like the Real Need you ended up with, it should be okay, because you can always tell the story of how you denied your Real Need, all the way to the end, and ended up getting what you wished for but still felt unfulfilled...like there was a hole in your life and you just didn't know what it was.

How to choose a Real Need for someone? The Real Needs that have the most juice will be the ones that are in conflict with the PC's Surface Goal. If you go directly opposite (choosing Family for someone who's going on the road to get away from their family) it might be a little too predictable, so doing something a bit tangential is better (maybe they need to find a new family, or maybe one family member is still important to them). But if you can't think of a good slightly tangential Real Need, it is better to be predictable and juicy than unpredictable and irrelevant.

Another source of juicy Real Needs is when you know the player well enough to predict how they're going to play, and give their character a Real Need that plays against that. Have a player who's a mother in real life, whose character has a daughter in the game? Make it their Real Need to let the daughter go - not be too overprotective. Then set up situations where the daughter keeps making bad decisions. They'll earn black stones like crazy.

It might occur to you to make some fundamental changes to someone's character: "His Real Need is to admit he's gay" or "His Real Need is to admit he really wants to be a fashion designer" - that's legal, but it's a bit tough to play (you're going to have to hint to the character's player that they really like fashion) - so it's better to look at the character as they've been established so far and find a need that fits in with what you know (his father's a cop? he should be a cop too; they knew each other in high school? he was her secret crush; he's been convicted of petty crimes? he should stop doing those.)

Once you've come up with a Real Need, discuss how you're going to create situations about that Need and hint at that Need to the player. If their need revolves around another PC, the onus is on that PC's player to create those situations - if Barb's Real Need is that Jake is her soul mate, if only she would realize, then Jake should keep putting himself in scenes with Barb, reminding her about their long history together, and making himself seem desirable but unavailable - even though his own Real Need may have nothing to do with her.

Here is a list of options. Facilitator: no need to read every one of these to the players - read a few as suggestions, then you can let them come up with their own ideas and figure out afterwards how they fit with the list.

Real Need: Commit

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Alison: You didn't sleep with her?
Gib: Still seeing Jason?
Alison: Broke up.
Gib: That's too bad.
Alison: You didn't sleep with her.
Gib: Wasn't my type.
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-The Sure Thing

This is the love story or the buddy movie. Maybe they're two strangers who don't like each other at first that fate has thrown together, and if only they'd stop to appreciate each other; maybe they're friends or friends-with-benefits who are really soul-mates. (*The Sure Thing*, *Planes/Trains/Automobiles*, the guy who got together with Kristen Bell in *Fanboys*)

They Are Done When: their partner reciprocates or denies their love / friendship.

Situations: Keep putting the two characters into scenes together. (If they're not on the trip they keep calling.) Have the beloved push against the Surface Goal ("Come back home." "Let's take a break and spend some time here.")

Hints: "Didn't you used to date in high school? Why'd you break up, anyway?"

Real Need: Accept Yourself For Who You Really Are

> Mittens: But how'd you... I mean, you don't have any superpowers.
> Bolt: I know.
> Mittens: Really?
> Bolt: Yeah.
> Mittens: Wow. Crazy day for you, huh?
>
> -Bolt

They're not special. Maybe they're even kind of a loser. And that's okay. They just have to come out and say it, and that kind of makes everything better. (Like in *Little Miss Sunshine*) Or: they're *already* special. The scarecrow really does have a brain, the tin man really does have a heart. Or: come out of the closet. They've got some secret. Maybe they haven't even admitted it to themselves! (But do see above on the risks of making fundamental changes to a character.)

When making your Epiphany, it is not enough to guess "I need to accept myself who I really am" - you also need to know who you really are. ("I'm gay", "I'm not a superhero", "I'm a loser", "I wasn't meant to be rich")

They Are Done When: They narrate a soliloquy about accepting themselves, or roleplay a conversation where they accept themselves - or, if they're not their self yet, then they need to become their self. An example would be Bolt - his Real Need wasn't to be just any ordinary dog, his Real Need was to be Penny's ordinary dog, so even though he had his epiphany halfway through the story, he still needed to find Penny.

Situations: Say you have a character who wants to be a businessman but is really happy just being outdoors. As they're driving through the wilderness, another character points out, "There are some some awesome hiking trails out here."

Hints: "Yeah, when Joe was a kid he used to miss school all the time, because he was out hiking our camping or fishing or what-have-you."

Real Need: Confess/Atone

They're guilty of some wrong you've done to another PC or key NPC. This could be: Come out of the closet *to someone in particular*. There's someone they haven't told their secret to, and they need to.

They Are Done When: they are forgiven, or the wronged character says something to the effect of "I will never forgive you."

Situations: The character they have wronged gets in their way.

Hints: How will this play out? Maybe something in the character's background that you've already established is clearly the wrong they need to atone for; or maybe the player has no idea that they've wronged someone. In which case, you could drop hints in dialog. Sally seems hostile to him in every scene. Later, Josie mentions that Sally is still bitter over that thing that happened years ago. "What thing?" the player asks. Josie gives an exasperated sigh. "You don't remember?!"

Real Need: Forgive

The inverse of confess/atone: someone has wronged them. They need to forgive the guilty. This could be interesting if the guilty person isn't asking for forgiveness...

Your Epiphany has to include what you're forgiving them for. ("I need to forgive Joe" is not enough; "I need to forgive Joe for stealing my girlfriend" is.)

They Are Done When: They explicitly forgive.

Situation: This is particularly punchy when their Surface Goal is some kind of revenge. "I'm going to win this prize to show her she should never have said that about me."

Hints: A false or insincere apology would be great. "I'm sorry you feel that way about how I 'stole' your girlfriend, but she's her own person."

Real Need: Stand Up For Yourself

> Harold: And if either one of you douche bags ever tries to pull this shit again, I'll go to Berenson myself. I'll tell him what's really going on. And I'll tell the whole office how you both caught gonorrhea from that prostitute in Atlantic City.
>
> -Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle

Another PC or key NPC tends to boss this PC around - what they really need to do is stand up for themselves.

Desiring freedom is a case of standing up for yourself. If you want freedom to be the Real Need - ask "Who is preventing them from being free?" - mom and dad, maybe? - and that's who they have to Stand Up To.

They Are Done When: they stand up to that character, and we find out the repercussions.

Situation: Whoever they're supposed to stand up to keeps pestering them. "You need to pick up the pace! You were supposed to be in Boise yesterday!"

Hints: "Why do you let him push you around like that?"

Real Need: Let Someone Go

> Marlin: No, I am not gonna lose you again!
> Nemo: Dad, there's no time! It's the only way we can save Dory! I can do this!
> Marlin: ... You're right. I know you can.

-Finding Nemo

The inverse of 'Stand Up For Yourself' - they are overprotective, and they need to let their ward spread their wings and fly, carry the ball, do things their own way, make their own mistakes.

They Are Done When: they let the ward do something they consider foolish, dangerous, or wrong and we find out the repurcussions

Situations: The ward keeps doing dangerous, troublesome things.

Hints: Again from *Finding Nemo* - meet someone who isn't so overprotective, who gives a little speech about how you've got to let people make their own mistakes.

Real Need: Family or Friends

Situations: Put their family (or people they could come to feel as their family) in trouble.

Hints: point out their loneliness to them. "I don't get you Zeke. Staying at home by yourself every night, playing that World of Warcraft."

Off The List

If you want to create a Real Need that can't be shoehorned into one of the above, that's okay, just

- tell the player that you picked a need that isn't on the list
- after the game session, register to edit this wiki (if you haven't already) and add your new need to the list. And add your name to the author list.

Needs should be "feel good" needs! "Revenge", for example, is not a good Real Need. (It is a good Surface Goal.) [Though I would be interested to one day see a game where everyone had humane Surface Goals but dark Real Needs. You try to forgive someone but really you need revenge, because they're just that bad...]

Example of Choosing A Real Need: Destination Flagstaff

Clair's player puts down her headphones and waits for the other players (they're playing over skype) to decide what her Real Need is - they'll send her an IM when they're ready.
Billy Bob's player: We went to high school together. What if her real need is to get together with me?
Jimmy James's player: Yeah, that's a good one.
Kyle's player: Well, I don't know her (the player) that well. Is she going to be annoyed at having to roleplay a love relationship with Billy Bob?

Jimmy James's player: (Who does know Clair's player well.) Oh, no problem. She's cool.
Kyle's player: Ok. This means it's on you, Billy Bob, to set up situations for her - to accidentally be alone with her - oh! You could tell her, "You know I still haven't gotten over that broken heart you gave me."
Billy Bob: Ok, I'll try.
They IM Clair's player and she puts her headphones back on. It's the next player's turn to get a Real Need.

The First Scene

This is your kickoff scene. The facilitator starts, unless he wants to cede to someone else who is burning to frame it. Every PC, and every NPC that is going on the trip, are in the scene. Maybe one or two of the key NPC's who aren't going are also in the scene. You are packing or buying supplies or or about to disembark. Go.

On The Road

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Bernadette: Oh Felicia. Where the fuck are we?
                                        -Priscilla, Queen of the Desert
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After the send-off scene and each situation thereafter, pass the car marker to the player on your left. It is now their turn to have a situation, they are the active player. They do not get to frame their situation, though - the rest of the players get to do that, taking into account, in this order of importance:

1. what has come before - the previous situation may have had some dangers or prices or fallout that have become the new situation (someone died, someone gut hurt, a cop is pulling you over...)
2. what your Surface Goal and Real Need are, and trying to put them into conflict.
3. where you are on the journey. Look at the map - does it seem like anything interesting might happen where you currently are or on the next segment of your trip?
4. pull tropes from road movies: hitch-hiker, rest-stop, bridge out, road work, traffic...

Very often this will take the form of someone wanting to do something that will set back or derail the whole group's mission to Get There. The active player will have to do something to keep them on track, but doing this will push them away from their real need (often without them realizing it.)

After the situation is set up, and you've roleplayed a little, there will probably be some conflict between the active PC and another character, at which point you bring out the dice.

If there's no conflict, if it's just a color scene, that's ok - don't let it drag on too long looking for the conflict but enjoy the color. Any player can say "That sounds like a good place to cut" at any time, but it's up to the current player to decide.

On The Map And The Story

Progress along the map is not the game. The map is there to give cues for telling a story. “Oh, we’re in Colorado now? It’s so beautiful here, I just want to stop and look at the sights.” “We’re in Texas? We get a flat, and have to stop at a redneck-looking place called the Dew Drop Inn.” The segments you’ve divided the route into are there as a guide, not a scoring system. If you all agree it makes sense for the story to take more or less time to get to your destination, do it. If you take a detour...or even decide to go somewhere else entirely, you’re awesome.
Or maybe your group splits up. Now you need to keep track of where everyone is on their way to the destination city.

Roleplaying Your Real Need

While role-playing, you may do stuff that's out-of-sync with your Real Need, or totally in-sync with your Real Need. Once per situation, the other players (as a group) can give you a black stone if you're acting against your Need or a white stone if you're acting with your Need.

> **Example: Destination Flagstaff**
>
> Billy Bob's Real Need is to meet a nice NPC and settle down. Clair's Real Need is to get together with Billy Bob. Kyle's Need is to move the hell out of North Dakota. At a Waffle House in Fargo, one of the other players introduces Flo, a waitress who knows Billy Bob from before and wants Billy Bob to bring her along on the trip. Billy Bob tries to talk her out of it, and the other players give him a black stone. Clair - trying to help get Flo and Billy Bob together, because her player doesn't know her own Real Need - says, "Oh, come on Billy Bob, let her come." So the other players give her a black stone as well. Then Kyle says, "Enough delays - let's get on the road." So the other players give him a white stone.

Black Stones

Black stones give you minuses to your die rolls. Your first black stone gives you -1 to your highest die. Your second black stone gives you -1 to your second highest die. Etcetera. If you have more black stone then dice, it wraps around - 4 black stones and 3 dice means -2 to your highest, -1 to your second and third.

White Stones

White stones can buy off black stones, one for one - or you can spend them on a 4th die for a conflict roll.

PC vs NPC: The Dice

> Richard: Oh my God, I'm getting pulled over. Everyone, just... pretend to be normal.
>
> -Little Miss Sunshine

(The Dice are basically [1] but I rewrote it without looking so I wouldn't violate copyright or the rules of Game Chef).

When there's conflict between a PC and NPC, or when a PC is attempting something that the other players don't think would be easy to pull off, you turn to the dice.

Determine the stakes: the PC is doing what they're doing to get - what? This is their Good Result. The Good Result shouldn't simply be "We get to keep going and get further down the road" - it should be something above and beyond that the character wants.

Then, together, come up with two Prices that might be paid for pursuing that Good Result. This is something you all work out together. One of the Prices should be related to the player's actions and the Good Result; the other Price can be anything, any setback. The Prices will probably be complications that inform future scenes. (Car breaks down, someone gets hurt, it could even be that a key NPC dies! Hell, it could even be that a key PC dies, if you all agree on that before the roll.)

The active player has something of a pocket veto, because they can refuse to act, though depending on the situation you've set up for them, it might mean they don't make it any further down the road for now. (But if the active player doesn't agree to any of the Prices, they're not in the spirit of the game - Road Movies are rife with complications leading to complications, prices leading to prices. Bad stuff happens and it's fun. I haven't run into a player like this yet, so I don't even know if this is worth mentioning.)

Ideas for dangers, prices, setbacks:

- lost or diverted - draw on the map that you went the wrong way, ended up in the wrong town or at the wrong landmark - the next player will want to roll to get back on track, somehow, by asking for directions or trusting their navigational sense or something.
- out of gas, tire blowout, mechanical failure - you won't make any progress until you've solved the trouble, but the repair shops and whatnot won't make it easy
- cop pulls you over - particularly juicy if you're already doing something wrong
- carsickness - only interesting if you're *really* carsick, like you don't want to drive another mile until it passes
- NPC on the trip with you has issues - sick, dead, insane
- crash
- another driver has road rage
- need to stop for rest or food - and something happens
- deer or dog in road - and you hit them - and they're suffering
- escaped tiger in road

(Tropes and cliches are great; just don't use the same idea again once it's come out in play.)

Roll 3 dice, or 4 if you're spending a white stone.

Then you assign the dice to the Good Result and the Prices paid. If you roll 4 dice you'll have an extra die that won't hurt you, that you can throw away.

Good Result:

- 1-2: The good result does not happen.
- 3-6: The good result does happen.

Price Paid:

- 1-3: The price must be paid.
- 4-6: The price isn't paid.

Depending on the conflict and possibly the results of the roll (often it will make sense to advance whether you succeed or fail at the win result), decide whether you advance down the road or not. If you do, draw a dashed line along the road to the next hash mark.

Example: Cat Journey

In a road trip about stray cats inspired by *Bolt* and *Warriors*, Kitstripe the striped cat is on the road because it's a rite of passage for young cats, to prove that he can take care of himself. That's his skin goal. Kitstripe's key NPC is Flowereye, his older sister, and Kitstripe's player decided that their relationship is one in which Flowereye is overprotective: Flowereye fights Kitstripe's battles for him - denying him his skin goal. What he doesn't know is the other player gave him a real goal of "Be With Family" - meaning, deep down, it's more important that he get along with his sister than he prove himself!

The price from a previous situation was "attacked by rats" - so now, fighting with the rats, they decide the stakes are: Kitstripe wants to prove to his sister that he can take care of himself, and kill several rats on his own. The bad things that could happen: Kitstripe gets hurt; Flowereye gets mad at Kitstripe for putting himself in danger. The group decides this is neither towards nor away from his real goal - no stones are given. He uses 3d6, and has no black stones so far. They come up 2-4-4: they could either be a win and a price paid, or a wash. He decides it's a wash: his sister jumped in and did his fighting for him, again - he didn't get to prove himself, but he didn't get hurt or get her mad at him, either.

Note that in this conflict, they beat the rats no matter what! Just like in Primetime Adventures, the stakes don't have to be about whether you win or lose, its about what they mean to your character and what prices you pay.

Since they beat the rats they decide it makes sense to get to the next segment of the journey.

PC vs PC: No Dice

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Richard Hayden: Oh that sounds good: melted chocolate inside the
dash. That really ups the resale value.
Tommy: I think you'll be okay here, they have a thin candy
shell. 'Surprised you didn't know that.
Richard Hayden: I think your brain has a thick candy shell.
Tommy: Your... Your brain has the shell on it.
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-Tommy Boy

Often your goals will conflict with other NPCs - if you're in love with an NPC you can try to seduce them; if you want forgiveness from an NPC you can try to convince them that you sincerely regret; etcetera, and roll the dice.

But what if it's a PC? What if you're in love with a PC or want forgiveness from a PC or want to stand up to a PC? Then you don't go to the dice. You roleplay it. And you can't tell another player how to play their character. If they decide their character forgives you, great. If they decide their character will never love you, so it goes.

Even if it's physical: "I beat the crap out of you." "No you don't. You try but fail." "Oh."

> **Example: Destination Flagstaff**
>
> Clair, a PC, realizes she's in love with Billy Bob, another PC, and she tells him so. But Billy Bob has realized his Need as well, and it's for Flo, so he tries to let Clair down gently. Sorry Clair.

Who plays the NPCs?

When it's time for a given NPC to interact, anyone but the player whose situation it is can start playing that NPC and interacting with the other PC's. It will probably be a player who's not heavily involved in the current dialog or action. Once somebody's started playing a given NPC, it's good if they play that NPC for the rest of the game, but not mandatory. No player should do a running dialog with themselves. If that comes up, they should simply ask, "Hey, who wants to take over so-and-so for me?"

PC vs Nothing: Color Scene

If there was no conflict, if it was just a color scene, that's fine. Go ahead and advance to the next hash mark on the road.

Epiphany

> Dwayne: You know what? Fuck beauty contests. Life is one fucking beauty contest after another. You know, school, then college, then work, fuck that. And fuck the air force academy. If I wanna fly, I'll find a way to fly. You do what you love, and fuck the rest.

> Frank: I'm glad you're talking again, Dwayne. You're not nearly as stupid as you look.
>
> -Little Miss Sunshine

At some point during their turn, the player may choose to make *one* (out-of-character) Official Guess as to what their need is. Not just the general class of need, but specifically in the game-story what the Need is for you. For example: "Is it 'commit'? Am I in love with Daphne?" or "Is it 'family'? Do I need to stop fighting with my sister?" (If a player forgets to make their Official Guess it's sportsmanlike to remind them to do so before going to the next player's Situation, and will help keep the game length down.)

The other players can then vote, majority rule, whether the player was close enough. When judging a mistaken guess, it's perfectly kosher to give clues like, "That's in the ballpark," or "You're getting warmer."

Example, Gaga Fever

In a story about a road trip to see a Lady Gaga concert, Amber's Real Need is to "not be too protective of her little sister." Joe's Real Need is to "quit his job as a drafter and become a costume designer" - that's why he's a closet Gaga fan.

Early on, after a scene where Amber catches her little sister making out with a stranger, they argue, and the little sister runs away, Amber's player gets a black stone. "Is my Real Need to get away from my sister?" Amber's player asks. Joe's player says, "It's in the ballpark."

Joe goes out and looks for the little sister, and gets a black stone. Joe's player asks, "Is my Real Need to stop letting Uncle Kevin tell me what to do?" Amber's player says, "That's sort of in the right direction, but no."

If you do correctly identify your Real Need, take a minute to narrate your Epiphany. This is a soliloquy where you describe suddenly understanding what you care about. "As Carla and I fought the crazed hitch-hiker side-by-side, I noticed the way the sunlight struck her hair, and realized why I'd been so hostile to her this whole time - because I was really in love with her."

Once you've had your Epiphany the game isn't usually over! Now you pursue your Real Need - and when you win or lose it, you're Done.

After you have your Epiphany, it is now the other players responsibility to "tempt" your character with your Skin Need. You went to Vegas to have an affair, but realize your wife is what matters? Time for them to frame you in a scene with your potential mistress. Hey, maybe you can have it all...

Epiphanies Clear Your Stones And Give You Permanent Four Dice

Once you've had your Epiphany, all your white and black stones go away. And from now on, any time you roll to pursue your Real Need, you get four dice.

John Walton's Way To Do (or Not Do) Epiphanies:

John suggested this alternative, which I haven't playtested yet, but will the next time I play: there is no out-of-character "official guess" guessing game. (John thinks the guessing game is Not So Awesome.) You are never explicitly told what your real need is. You just keep playing, trying to hone in on it. Maybe you get it, maybe you don't. Maybe you stage yourself having an epiphany - if your epiphany is real, the other players give you a white stone. Otherwise, black. (I've heard some say that Jules' epiphany at the end of Pulp Fiction where he decides to give up the life and walk the earth is a false epiphany, for example, so this doesn't break the game.) It should flow better than the other method, though I do worry it'll become a game where nobody knows what they really want. We'll see!

How Much Hinting?

> Linus: Exactly. You did nothing. Absolutely nothing. Eric Bottler graduates high school and never looks back. You bailed on our plan, Bottler!
> Eric: What plan? To be the next big thing in comics? Come on, man. That was never gonna happen. I did what I had to do, dude. I grew up. I'm the only one who did. Look at you guys.
> Linus: You know, you could fool anybody with this cheap suit, salesman-of-the-year pitch. But I know you better than anybody and deep down, you are one miserable son of a bitch.
>
> -Fanboys

For me, a perfect game of *Nowhere Road* with a lot of players would have one of the characters--one who's near the end of the rotation--have their epiphany at the end of their first situation; a little under half of the characters would have it in their second, before they got to the Destination City; and the other half would have it shortly after arriving, and maybe one character wouldn't have one at all.

So in a player's first situation, try a light touch with the hints. Give them a situation that plays against their Need, but they don't know why yet. It's okay if one player gets his Epiphany right away, but for the most part you all want to be wrongheadedly pursuing your Skin Goals at least a bit.

Coming up to the second situation, hint stronger. Work other players Real Needs into dialog. "Yeah, he and Susie were childhood sweethearts."

By a player's third situation and on, they should be at the destination and it's almost too late for them. Beat them over the head with it. NPC's act as role models; beloveds throw themselves at lovers; even egregious hints like "Remember when we were kids you said all you really wanted was a place of your own?"

Yet another way to hint is to tell other players how they feel. In this game, you're allowed to do that. Look at it this way: the player who owns the character is playing their conscious mind; but the rest of the group is playing their subconscious. Don't tell them *why* they feel what they feel, just say things like, "You're starting to feel angry." "You feel sad." "You feel elated." Then let them try to interpret those emotions.

Arriving At The Destination City

> [*Clark punches the Marty Moose statue*]
> Ellen Griswold: Clark, what are you doing?
> Clark: We watch his program... We buy his toys, we go to his movies... he owes us. Doesn't he owe us, huh? He owes the Griswolds, right? Fuckin' A right he owes us!
>
> -Vacation

If you make it to the Destination City, the game doesn't end right away. The game continues the same way, with you setting up situations for each other, in the context of the destination, where characters can pursue their Surface Goals at the cost of their Real Needs. If their Surface Goal is to sell drugs to make a huge pile of cash, and their Real Need is to be with the girl, have the girl threaten to leave him if he really goes ahead with The Meet. If their Surface Goal is to go to the blowout party, but their Real Need is family, their brother shows up at the party and asks them to come home.

Here, it's time for the Win Result to be "Achieve your Surface Goal!" And the cost should be "Lose your Real Need forever!" if there's a way to do it that makes sense, such as "Daphne will never forgive you."

After you achieve your Surface Goal, you have one last chance to guess your Real Need. If you fail, you're Done.

Here's another way of looking at. Although for the characters, the Destination City is a goal to reach, in game terms it is more of a time buzzer: once you make it to the City, you better have your Epiphany soon or you "lose."

Example, *Destination Flagstaff*

Billy Bob Gunderson has made it all the way to Flagstaff without realizing that his real need is to settle down with his old high school crush, Flo. So as far as he's concerned, it's time to enter the Tractor Pull competition and try to win the money he thinks he needs. Although Flo was left behind in a county jail in Nebraska, this is a good time for the other players to pull her out and give Billy Bob one last chance at redemption. She's gotten out of jail and hitchhiked to Flagstaff, we say, and she manages to get into the pits and see Billy Bob one last time as he's suiting up for the pull.

"Don't do it, Billy Bob!"

"Don't do what?"

"Don't enter the competition. I'm afraid you'll get hurt."

"But Flo - I thought you liked tractor pulls."

"I do - but - I can't bear to see you hurt. Please don't do it."

Billy Bob ignores her and enters - and the other players give him a black stone. A good success for this scene is: he wins the competition and gets the money he needs to pay off the loan shark. A good price for this scene is: Flo will never forgive him. (The other price could be he gets hurt, his tractor gets damaged...) Supposing he achieves his goal. He gets one last chance to have his Epiphany. If he now says, "Wait, was I supposed to get together with Flo?" then he could try to win her - assuming he didn't already pay the "Flo will never forgive him" price. If she's never going to forgive him - then he's Done.

When does the game end?

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Thelma: Then let's not get caught.
Louise: What are you talkin' about?
Thelma: (indicating the Grand Canyon) Go.
Louise: Go?
Thelma is smiling at her.
Thelma: Go.

                                        -Thelma & Louise
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The game ends when every PC is Done. This can either be a good Done (stick a fork in me, I'm done) or a bad Done (I'm done for).

One way a PC is Done is when they've had their Epiphany and they either successfully pursue their Real Need or it is denied to them. It may end before they even arrive at their destination, like *Thelma & Louise* - or it may end after they arrive and come home again, like *The Sure Thing*. (Also, like *The Sure Thing*, you can make the return trip instantaneous: just frame the situation: “We’re back home, and...”)

Or, they're Done because they've successfully pursued their skin goal, and they never guessed their Real Need.

Once every PC is Done, the only thing remaining are Epilogues. Starting with the player who knows the rules, take turns having Epilogues. You may want to share your Epilogue with another player, if it makes sense. (Lovers kissing on a rooftop a la *The Sure Thing*; a stranger invited to dinner with the rest of the family a la *Planes, Trains, & Automobiles*; some kind of big happy party a la *Fanboys*).

It's your "Happily Ever After" if you achieved your Real Need; it's your "Unhappily Ever After" if your Real Need was denied you; it's your "Mysteriously Unfulfilled" if you never guessed your Real Need.

AP

Of a previous version that didn't use stones: http://story-games.com/forums/comments.php?DiscussionID=13015&page=1#Item_1

Two players, with stones:
http://story-games.com/forums/comments.php?DiscussionID=13038

Afterword

I hadn't heard of Ribbon Drive when Game Chef 2010 inspired this. So I ordered it, but finished a couple drafts of this before I got to look at it. It looks really cool - if you're going for more serious road-trip roleplaying, an art house indie movie road-trip, like *y tu mama tambien* or *Everything is Illuminated*, one more about feelings and relationships than comedy, that's the game you should go with.
This game ended up pretty similar to Ribbon Drive anyway. The Surface Goals from Nowhere Road are a lot like the Futures from Ribbon Drive: to “win” a game of Ribbon Drive, to become the protagonist, you have to deny your Futures, just as you have to deny the Surface Goals in this game.

Still later, I discovered *Wraith: The Oblivion* from 1994. Here is a game where one of the other players plays your shadow-self. Haven’t played it, and probably will never get to play it, but it sounds like the real-goals / surface-goals thing here is that, flipped on its head. Here you’re playing your PC to fail, while the other players are encouraging your PC to find their true heart - whereas in Wraith you’re playing to succeed and your shadow player is trying to sabotage you. Still, multiple selves played by different players, cool.